

FORUM: New technology a winner for state and taxpayers

By Michelle Steel

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When San Diego County taxpayers enter the Board of Equalization's new state-of-the-art District Office, they will no longer have to wait in a long line just to check in. They also won't have to stand around waiting if all they need to do is file and pay their taxes.

The new San Diego District Office, at 15015 Avenue of Science, Suite 200, San Diego, is the first in the state to offer e-file kiosks that allow taxpayers to simply log on, file, and pay their taxes without having to wait in line for an open service window. Instead of waiting to check in with a receptionist, taxpayers entering the San Diego office will find an automated check-in system that will allow them to specify their needs and point them in the right direction.

The state-of-the-art facility, which celebrated its grand opening on March 14, is a one-stop shop for business owners. It is a result of the consolidation of the BOE's San Marcos and San Diego district offices and a new step in the BOE's continuing effort to increase transparency and efficiency at the state's most comprehensive tax agency.

Since my first year on the job in 2007, the BOE has made great strides to improve customer service statewide. The agency's [website](#), for example, has gone from a technical maze to a valuable and highly accessible resource for all Californians.

Before 2007, Californians interested in the proceedings of BOE meetings had to either attend them in person or request transcripts. By 2007, audio streaming had begun on the board's website, allowing taxpayers to listen in to board proceedings from the convenience of their homes or offices. In 2008, video streaming was added, and now all Californians can watch board proceedings live.

The website provides hotline services and information on how to make public records requests, and offers information in Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Korean. Upon request, we can also provide you with translations into 23 additional languages.

Before 2009, the BOE only offered in-person tax seminars. While these are a great service, they are not always easy for business owners to attend during business hours. Today the BOE offers online seminars that address issues such as starting and growing your business, tax matters for nonprofit and faith-based organizations, sales and use tax compliance, e-filing of tax returns, cigarette and tobacco retail sales, and how to make an appeal to the BOE.

Expanded e-services are a win-win for both taxpayers and state government. Both the state and taxpayers benefit from the added convenience, reduced administrative costs, fewer errors in processing, and quicker collection of taxes than using traditional mail.

These strides in improving customer service are on display at the new San Diego office from the moment you walk in, making the unwelcome process of filing taxes easier for everyone.

Through consolidation of functions and the use of newly available technology, we can continue to increase efficiencies and decrease costs for taxpayers. I am committed to helping taxpayers, so they can focus on running the businesses that create jobs for California.

Michelle Steel represents San Diego County on the State Board of Equalization and serves as vice chair.